HOW TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN VOLUNTEERS

Involving community members is part of the best way to get important work done in our neighborhoods. Volunteers provide needed help, better contacts and access to resources, greater community representation, better community relations and a more effective effort. Unsure about how to recruit new volunteers, yet alone how to keep them once you have enlisted their help? Here are some tips to get you started:

1. Personally invite people to come forward. Never assume everyone knows help is needed. Most people volunteer because they were asked.
2. Ask volunteers how they would like to be involved. Do they prefer to lead or to work behind the scenes? Do they have any special skills or talents? Resources are needed beyond volunteers—would they prefer to donate goods, materials, storage space, rental equipment, etc.?
3. Be clear on what you want people to do before you recruit anyone. Explain what jobs are available, what is involved for each position, and what would be the best fit for their talent and interest.
4. Be honest. Tell prospective volunteers what time and effort the role entails, even if it sounds like a lot. It may take longer to find someone willing to fill the position, but once you do, you'll have the right person.
5. Be flexible. Find out what works best for a person's schedule. Is this a job that can be done nights or weekends?
6. Define what support the volunteer will have, i.e., job manual, guidance from person who previously held the position, working with a partner, etc. If the prospect knows they will get help while they learn the ropes, they will be more likely to give it a try.
7. Identify and express the positives of volunteering. Not only will their community benefit from their help, there are personal payoffs as well. People volunteer for a variety of reasons—to give back to the community, to get to know others, to learn a skill for career development, to feel useful and needed, because someone (parent, school, law enforcement) told them to—the list of possible motivations is extensive. Share the ways you've grown personally from your own volunteer work. Be sure to point out that they will have fun!
8. Explain why you decided to ask this particular person to help—what skills or personality traits make her or him a good candidate for the position. This will imply the person has the talent to do the job and that's quite flattering!
9. If you get a "yes" answer, create a positive environment. You want them to have a good experience and volunteer again. Introduce them to others working on the project. Keep in touch—call to see how things are going or if they need any help. Let them know you appreciate their involvement, their new ideas and their energy.
10. Provide some type of recognition for your volunteers. Reward them with praise for their work, small gifts, public recognition, social gatherings, name badges, certificates, leadership roles, etc.
11. At the conclusion of the project, ask for their input on what went well and what can improve, and provide them with feedback on the success of the project.
12. If you've had the recruitment conversation and are turned down, don't be discouraged and don't be afraid to ask the person again. Perhaps another opportunity will come along at a better time or be more suitable to their skills and interests.
13. Continue reaching out to new people and lending visibility to your good works. New volunteers provide fresh ideas and enthusiasm and prevent steady volunteers from overload and burn out.

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Volunteers can be found in a multitude of places. Make use of different ages, skill sets, cultures and perspectives. Volunteers can be:

- Neighbors
- Family
- Friends
- Business people
- Someone with professional skills you need (barter special skills for something you have to offer)
- An organization you collaborate with on a project
- Students (high school students need service hours and college students are seeking experience for their resumes)
- School groups (musical groups, clubs)
- Day care or child care groups
- Scout groups
- Church groups
- Club members
- Elderly people from local senior center
- Persons fulfilling court ordered community service